

Fear and Hope

Fear

Fear is one of the basic instincts of every living creature when confronted with some kind of danger. Whenever in its struggle for life the human being is confronted with the alternatives of either avoiding danger or-facing harm or destruction, the feeling of fear gives it the power necessary to secure survival.

Hence the purpose of fear is to mobilize one's energy and effort to find the way of deliverance from danger and peril. Had the human beings of prehistoric times failed to avoid the various dangers that threatened them, the human species would not have survived.

This principle is valid not only in the case of dangers to physical life but also holds in respect of any threat to man's personality that gives rise to the feeling of fear. Common experience has shown that the danger of becoming subject to the domination of others is a greater cause of fear amongst individuals than anything else. Such a fear can paralyze one's active life for months, or even years, and bring active life to a standstill.

In fact, this anxiety arises from a threat to personality and the danger of its loss. Someone who is faced with such a threat feels as if he has no power to take any decision. He is compelled to seek others' help and decide his affairs through their assistance.

The stronger one's fear of losing one's personality, the more intense is the anxiety that torments him. At times this condition may reach the point of madness. That which is said concerning inherent instincts, that they are beneficial for survival and for the preservation of life, is true only when they do not exceed the limits of moderation. But when they become extreme they can become harmful.

Imaginary fears born of ungrounded imaginings and foregoing of misfortune and grief are signs of a kind of painful pathological condition which weakens the power of thought. As revealed by the researches done by specialists in the field, this factor not only leads many people to lose their well-being but also results in considerable harm.

It has often been observed that the state of crisis resulting from panic and anxiety becomes the cause of untimely death, for an unexpected bout of panic can upset the mechanism of one's life and bring life to a sudden halt.

Sometimes, the state of fear and anxiety is a prelude to severe psychic illness caused by some radical changes in a person's psyche; for sound and healthy persons do not ordinarily become subject to such states. On the contrary, they try with all their mental capacity to maintain and reinforce their mental equilibrium.

Some people are victims of vague and unknown fears. They cannot identify what troubles them, nor are those closest to them aware of the cause of their hidden anguish and pain. Age, of course, is of direct relevance in relation to feelings of fear and anxiety. These feelings are characteristic of childhood years, and all people, more or less, experience states of agitation and panic during their childhood years and well until the age of mental maturity.

In any case, this affliction destroys the urge for progress and immobilizes all elements of success, diminishing the level of one's mental and physical activity. Its harmful effects become visible throughout one's activities and conduct.

Aside from the fact that such fears are of no benefit, and regardless of whether the expected dangers materialize or not, the fear that one feels at the present has no result except causing waste of time and diminished physical and mental vigour. Moreover, when the feared misfortune or calamity actually does occur, one will lack the power and courage to face it.

Fear and anxiety reveal themselves in various forms. Dr. Cowlest says:

Do you lack self-confidence and consider yourself incapable of facing the conditions of life? Do you suffer from a painful feeling of shyness and timidity? Do you find it difficult in social gatherings to face someone whom you have not met earlier and does that make you uncomfortable and anxious? Don't you feel really comfortable and at ease when you are alone? I your answer to the above questions is Yes, then you are afraid. Do you feel that people consider you to be senseless? That they do not understand you? That everyone is against you? Do you think and brood a time concerning your past and what you have lost? Do you feel that you have committed a sin in the past in relation to a certain person, regardless of whether such a sin has been committed or not?

Do you continually think about yourself and are continually in a state of anxiety about what will happen to you? Are you quickly affected by people's idle talk and frivolous remarks? When you get angry and inflamed, are you afraid that you would not be able to control yourself?

Do you, in general, loath to associate with people and have strong prejudices? Do you find it difficult to develop terms of attachment and intimacy with others? All of these are different forms of fear. [1](#)

When one resolves to act in accordance with certain principles that one adopts in life and in a decisive manner, one will bear problems and misfortunes with courage and fortitude. Such a person puts up a manly resistance against hardships, and despair and despondency cannot subdue his spirit.

Many talented people who could attain a distinguished position in life by relying on this inner power and who possess adequate strength to expel fear from their minds cannot make an initial movement on his path due to the lack of sufficient courage. As a result, they fail to climb the ladder of progress and their capacities languish forever.

That which results in one losing control over one's life and affairs is indecisiveness. Wasting time worrying about events that may never happen will lead to irreparable harm. Shakespeare says: "Those who are afraid of the sting of the honey-bee do not deserve to possess the hive's honey."

It is possible for everyone at all times to get rid of unfounded fears and baseless anxieties and to replace them with optimistic ideas. No matter how strong one's will power may be, and however sublime one's goals should be, one cannot get rid of some habits instantaneously. Such habits must be eradicated gradually. It is not sufficient that one should be merely aware of being a victim to groundless notions; rather, one must make a consistent mental effort to guard one's personality against illusory fears. One should stop ruminating over distressing thoughts by opening one's mind to positive thoughts which are in complete contrast to them. In this way one can prepare the ground for considerable progress.

A lamp is not lighted until it is turned on, and once lighted it will not go off until it is switched off. Similarly, when the darkness of anxiety overwhelms one's spirit, one should turn on the lamp of His intellect and take a deep look at the realities of life and its bright side so that one's mind is relieved from the stress of baseless fears.

Someone who is unusually prone to illusory fears even in trivial matters should first examine these thoughts which upset his mental composure so as to discover that fear and anxiety are incapable of producing any positive results and that every difficulty requires thoughtful attention, then he should plant the seedlings of hope and confidence in the garden of his soul instead of cultivating the weeds of baseless anxieties and devote himself to their cultivation and care like an skilled gardener.

Without doubt, fear and anxiety are products of man's imagination and have no place outside the mind. When one realizes this fact, one would be able to dominate fear to a considerable extent and obtain peace of mind which is the most valuable of things.

Neither Timidity Nor Rashness

From the viewpoint of the science of ethics, virtue lays midway between the two extremes of excess and neglect. Courage is a virtue that lies midway between rashness and timidity. One who is free from recklessness and fear possesses the virtue of courage. It is a veritable truth that human advancement in

various fields, and even vital discoveries and explorations' of unknown continents, owe their existence to the courage of brave persons. It was their courage which was responsible for certain crucial developments in science.

On the whole, spiritual strength makes up the real factor behind human advancement and progress. The stronger one's spirit is in the struggle of life, the more brilliant will be one's achievements.

Intellectual and social revolutions cannot succeed without the element of courage. The role of this moral virtue in the course of human advancement in the material and intellectual spheres, as well as the results of practical experience, have convinced even the biggest skeptics of the truth of this matter. The strength and power exhibited by the character and conduct of positive personalities also effectively proves it.

The great men of history, who have played the most effective role in the deliverance of their nations and their release from distressing conditions, have generally been men of great valour and courage. In fact, the development of this quality will lead to the growth of other capacities as well.

Hence it is the duty of every individual to himself to pay more attention to the attainment of this great moral virtue which is one of the most beneficial of human qualities. The problems that should be solved, the tasks that must be carried out, and the results that should be obtained from them, may vary from one individual to another; but in practice their foundations rest upon personal courage.

For often many fruitful and formative ideas and innovative thoughts that come to the minds of some persons never cross the frontiers of their private thoughts due to fear and apprehension. They do possess the capacity and talent to attain personal excellence, but they lack the spirit of courage. Although in many cases they have faith in the validity of their opinions and their creative ideas, but, unfortunately, they do not possess the courage and confidence to express their fruitful opinions.

Whenever they are called upon to present their plans and proposals, they immediately become alarmed and upset, like someone who distrusts himself. Even in scientific and social debates, when faced with contrary opinions they retreat without making the least defense of their opinions. They withdraw their arguments, though their views are more logical and better reasoned than those of others and based on firmer and more valid foundations.

The causes and factors that lead to such a condition in persons should be explored and investigated, and unless these factors are not identified they will not achieve mental peace and personal courage. Possibly, such a person might have been full of hope and courage in his childhood years, but some unfortunate incidents might have arrested the growth of those capacities, or his fruitful and superior thoughts might have been repressed by his guardians and teachers due to neglect and ignorance.

When it becomes established that one's creative and constructive faculties have been weakened, one can take remedial steps for strengthening them by resorting to certain fundamental means. If he can

expel the baseless fears that dominate his being, he will gradually regain self-confidence. It is under the influence of the formative power of courage that doubts and misgivings will give way to inner composure and security.

Ignorance of the Character of Life

One of the basic factors that lead to anxiety and its growth to a dangerous point is ignorance of the characteristics of life. A person possessing courage knows well that life involves various kinds of hardships and setbacks. Whenever he encounters some difficulty, he maintains his composure, and this prepares him to face future adversities. For when one anticipates unpleasant events in the future, one will be somewhat prepared to face them.

And when the event actually takes place it will not affect him in an adverse manner. On the contrary, if someone does not possess the readiness to face life's tragedies, as soon as one of them occurs it will be a fearsome and shattering blow for him. Neglect and the lack of attention to the realities of life magnify the effect of tragic events and make them appear disproportionately deadly and frightful. Moreover, the readiness to face future tragedies prepares one mentally for the stage of recovery and smoothens the path of encountering them.

Voltaire says:

Throughout life man must advance like a warrior and die with his sword in his hand. Only weak and feeble-minded persons are knocked down by events. Only weak people constantly complain of the world's woes and hardships. As long as there is uncertainty about the dangers involved in an event and so long as there is any hope of averting it, don't give way to weakness. Remain steadfast with all the determination at your command.[2](#)

In general, awareness and consciousness are the most basic means for the reduction of anxiety and fear. With the advancement of human knowledge and the growth of man's intellect there is a decrease in the stresses caused by fears. That is why many factors that created fear in primitive and semi-primitive men during the various eras of man's history have no significance today for people due to advancement of knowledge and intellectual growth.

Experience has shown definitively that knowledge by itself results in confidence and tranquility, which takes the place of distressing anxieties. It is on this basis that all psychiatrists consider consciousness of that was previously subconscious and awareness of the causes of painful fears as part of the treatment for mental anxiety and depressing thoughts.

We should not forget the point that although the ancient fears have been dispelled to a considerable extent by the progress of science, the changes in modern life have substituted new anxieties for the fears of the past. In industrialized societies, which have created large cities with huge conglomerations

of people who remain strangers to one another, human beings have become lonelier despite the heavy concentrations of population.

The intimacy, friendship and attachment that marked interpersonal relations in the past have given way to feelings of estrangement and isolation. The concentration of population has led to alienation and loneliness. Although people live close to one another, they are not friendly and familiar with the moral, personal and spiritual characteristics of one another. In times of need, they are extremely parsimonious in offering one another help or consolation.

Indifference, injustice, different forms of vices, and neglect of duty and moral criteria lead to the emergence of fear. In fact, fear is a kind of punishment that man receives due to deviation from the course of moral growth.

An American thinker says:

All infractions of love and equity in our social relations are speedily punished. They are punished by fear. Whilst I stand in simple relations to my fellowman, I have no displeasure in meeting him. We meet as water meets water, or as two currents of air mix, with perfect diffusion and interpenetration of nature. But as soon as there is any departure from implicitness and attempt at halfness, or good for me that is not good for him, my neighbour feels the wrong; he shrinks from me as far as I have shrunk from him; his eyes no longer seek mine; there is war between us; there is hate in him and fear in me.

*All the old abuses in society, universal and particular, all unjust accumulations of property and power, are avenged in the same manner. Fear is an instructor of great sagacity and the herald of all revolutions. One thing he teaches, that there is rottenness where he appears. He is a carrion crow, and though you see not well what he hovers for, there is death somewhere. Our property is timid, our laws are timid, our cultivated classes are timid. Fear for ages has boded and mowed and gibbered over government and property. That obscene bird is not there for nothing. He indicates great wrongs which must be revised.*³

The Combination of Hope and Fear in Human Nature

In human nature hope and fear have been put together. These two are born with man in his infancy and grow with him. The fear of pain, suffering, poverty, and disability is a feeling that arises from within. On the other hand, there is the hope of security, comfort, prosperity, and strength. Every wish and hope that is fulfilled is immediately replaced by another. Fear and hope define and delimit our thoughts, conduct, and goals, and the very direction of our lives.

Man chooses his path through life in accordance with their character and extent. The person whose thoughts are occupied with expectations of wealth, position, and power, defines his goals on their basis and directs his activities toward these goals. That which preoccupies his mind and concerns is the choice of such means and methods as will materialize his hopes and desires in the shortest time.

However, one who has liberated himself from the bondage of such desires does not devote his efforts to this kind of goals in an unlimited and unconditional manner, for he is master of himself and is free from the chains of such obsessions.

By relying on the principle of fear and hope, Islam relieves the human being from every kind of fear which oppresses the soul and which has no bearing on real life. Because a fear that does not help change the unpleasant realities of life is futile. In this way, it liberates the human soul from fears relating to mundane matters and the transient gains of life, calling it to effort and endeavour in all fields of life. In the same way, it expels every deviant hope from the human soul and thus preserves it from deviance, so that man may orient himself towards a worthy and vigorous life and abstain from putting his reliance in anything except the eternal power of God.

Islam believes that none of the ordinary factors, however imposing, has essentially the power to cause benefit or harm. Hence they are not fit to be feared. That which should be feared is that Power that embraces every being in its omnipotence, sovereignty and dispensation. It is that which grants and deprives, gives and takes away. The Glorious Quran refers to this truth in these words:

(O honoured Messenger) say: "Who provides you out of heaven and earth or who rules over hearing and sight and who brings forth the living from the dead and brings forth the dead from the living and who directs the affair?" They will surely say "God" Then say: "Will you not then be God-fearing? (Qur'an Surah Yunus 10:31)

Moreover, since man's hopes are often related to various bounties of life and comforts and joys of a corporeal kind, Islam does not deprive anyone of wholesome joys and pleasures of this kind and does not ask people to turn their back on worldly matters. However, it redirects hopes from false and illusory values to real and true values and worthy aspirations. It warns man that he should not be deceived by transitory joys and get immersed in carnal desires and lusts, thus failing to realize everlasting and true joys. At all times it impels him to seek the pleasure of the sacred and glorious Essence of God:

Indeed, it is the abode of the Hereafter that is (true) life, did they but know! (Qur'an Surah Ankabat 29:64)

The emphasis placed on God-fearing in Islamic teachings in fact refers to the trepidation that one ought to feel concerning one's own conduct. This kind of fear is not only not harmful but is of great benefit, as it embraces the entire ambit of human conduct. The fear of the undesirable consequences of misconduct sharpens one's sense of caution and vigilance. It brings harmful urges under control and transforms man into a self-disciplined and orderly being.

Solely placing hope in God and His infinite compassion without any fear and trepidation concerning the consequences of one's conduct leads to unbridled and unprincipled behaviour and gives rise to many vices.

A person who is not wary of his own conduct and who pins all hopes in God's forgiveness and mercy can perpetrate any kind of inappropriate actions without feeling any kind of trepidation and still remaining hopeful. Possibly, his entire conduct and character may sink in sinfulness while his hopes remain high.

Accordingly, this absence of fear vis-à-vis God will lead to the degeneration of human conduct. That is why in religious teachings it has been emphasized that man's ideal condition is one wherein he wavers between fear and hope: while placing hope in God's infinite mercy, he should be afraid of the consequences of his own conduct, refraining from falling victim to pride and conceit.

Imam Sadiq, may Peace be upon him, said:

Fear keeps a watch over the human heart and hope is the soul's intercessor and that of its aspirations. Those who know God, fear Him, while they place their hopes in His grace. This fear and hope are like two wings of faith. By their means, those who study the order of being and creation fly towards God's good pleasure, and they witness God's promises and warnings with the eyes of their intellects. By inspiring awe in respect of His warnings, the fear of God turns them towards God's justice, and the hope in Him calls them toward His beneficence and favour. This is how hope revives the heart and fear suppresses satanic inclinations. [4](#)

Those who are equipped with the weapons of knowledge and faith are fearful of God's just retribution. In observing the Divine precepts, their motive is to be compliant towards God and His commands and prohibitions. A fear that arises from foresight serves as a warning that leads one to take precautionary measures. It impels him on the path of duty and draws him to observe his multifarious responsibilities. It restrains him from becoming polluted with the filth of sin and causes man to always keep his true felicity in view under all circumstances.

From the viewpoint of the Qur'an it is knowledge that produces awareness of real dangers that arise from unprincipled conduct:

Only those of His servants who possess knowledge fear God. (Qur'an Surah Fatir 35:28)

There is no doubt that the knowledge which raises a person to the rank of men of knowledge and is the means of self-discipline and inner purity is one which contributes to the development of the soul and guides its possessor to the infinite power of God and draws him to His worship. This knowledge preserves the human consciousness and intellect from being polluted with sin, and it is itself the most significant means for awakening the mind to the contemplation of the order of being and the remembrance of God:

[Surely in the creation of the heavens and earth and in the alternation of night and day there are signs for men possessed of minds] who remember God, standing and sitting and on their sides and reflect upon the creation of the heavens and the earth: 'O Lord! Thou hast not created this in vain. Glory be to Thee. Guard us against the chastisement of the fire. (Qur'an Surah Ale Imran

3: 190–191)

According to the Qur'an, guidance and insight are also products of the state of awe and fear vis-à-vis the Creator

And he who fears shall be heedful ... (Qur'an Surah A'la 87: 10)

A man questioned the Noble Messenger, may Peace and God's benedictions be upon him and his Household, concerning the following verse of the Qur'an

[Surely those who tremble in fear of their Lord, and those who believe in the signs of their Lord, and those who associate naught with their Lord] and those who give what they have been given their hearts quacking that they are returning to their Lord, [those vie in good works, outreaching to them]. (Qur'an Surah Mu'minun 23:60–1)

He asked the Prophet (S) if the verse also applies to someone who commits theft and adultery and drinks wine and yet fears God The Prophet (S) told him "It means a person who performs prayer and fasting and gives a helping hand to others, while fearing lest God should not accept any of his works "

A harmful and blameworthy kind of fears is one which arises from weakness and abasement. Such fears not only do not motivate anyone to perform edifying deeds, but also hinder progress and become obstacles in the way of human felicity. That is why in the course of their educative programmes the leaders of the Islamic faith have sought to liberate their followers from the bondage of unrealistic fears which weaken man's will power and destroy his self-confidence, through reliance on the great power of the intellect and conscience.

When 'Ali, may Peace be upon him, was prepared to march towards the scene of battle after having mobilized his army for war with the Khawarij, one of his companions who had some knowledge of astrology told him that it was not a propitious hour for setting out for battle and that it would lead to his defeat. 'Ali, may Peace be upon him, gave him the following reply dispelling his wrong ideas. He told him

Do you think that you can determine the hour during which evil would befall people if they go forth? Do you claim to warn them of the hour they would suffer harm if they go forth during it? Whoever confirms what you say rejects the Qur'an, considering that by believing you he does away with the need to seek God's help for attaining what he desires and avoids what he shuns. You want someone who obeys your prescriptions to praise you rather than His Lord, for as you claim, it is you who guide him concerning the hour in which he can secure benefits and avoid harms!

Then turning to the warriors of Islam, 'Ali, may Peace be upon him, declared "Set out in God's Name!"⁵ In this way, the Prince of the Faithful ordered the soldiers to march towards the battlefield by putting their reliance in the might of the Lord and without paying attention to the nonsense of the astrologer and heeding his prophecies Finally, the battle ended with the enemy's defeat and victory of 'Ali's army

In another of his sayings 'Ali, may Peace be upon him, instructs his followers in these words

Whenever you are apprehensive of the difficulty of some task, be steadfast and forbearing until it becomes easy for you. With all the hardship it may involve, make it appear simple and easy to those around you. As a result similar task will become inevitably easy for you to carry out.[6](#)

Psychologists say in this regard

We come across many people in daily life who are demoralized by fear, which they allow to dominate them.

Many people refrain from participating in social activities due to fear Overwhelmed by fear, they surrender to it and evade their social responsibilities.

Many students do not question their teachers due to fear, or they are so much overwhelmed by fear at the time of tests that they become incapable of responding properly Many people do not admit their mistakes because of fear, and there are some who do not have the courage say 'No,' because they are afraid that something will happen to them if they do not comply.

The consequence of this kind of behaviour is that fear is allowed to dominate the person. Gradually it diminishes his capacity to overcome his fear and increases his daily problems.

Someone who wants to have an exciting life in adult years should develop courage within himself. Everyone needs one or another kind of courage in life, and what could be better than acquiring it in childhood? If we develop personal courage t the proper time in life, we will have greater strength when it is needed.

There is a good way of developing courage and that is to carry out what is essential for mastering one's fear. Everyone has faced situations in life when he could carry out some task but refrained from performing it due to some fear (conscious or subconscious). For instance, you had an opportunity to participate in class discussions but did not because you were afraid. Or a friend of yours made to you a proposal which was against the principles you believed in, but you did not say 'No' to him so as not to disappoint him. Or you made a mistake which you did not admit due to fear. All these are forms of fear.

Now if you evaluate a situation and do what you must, you have been able to create courage within yourself, and this is the way to develop courage. Everytime that you do this, you will be adding to your courage, and gradually you will be able to overcome your fear. By developing courage you will be quite able to solve your problems[7](#)

Today, despite all the advancements made by man in his struggle against the forces of nature, people remain constantly obsessed in their lives by anxieties concerning the future, by fears of failure, sickness, defeat and so on. Baseless anxieties and fears of accidents and other hardships of life paralyze many creative and vigorous minds and consign many original and invaluable ideas to oblivion.

The Noble Messenger, may Peace and God's benedictions be upon him and his Household, says

The worst characteristics that may afflict a person are excessive slinginess and inordinate fear and cowardice.[8](#)

Weakness of Will

A weak will is the product of irrational fears. Doubt and vacillation may be the first signs of a deep-seated fear. Wherever there is doubt and hesitation, faith is absent, for one who lacks a perfect faith is constantly troubled by doubt and uncertainty. Vacillation and indecisiveness become his habitual traits. A person possessing faith does not fall victim to doubt and vacillation in his activities and goals, and there is no room in his mind and consciousness for vexing anxieties.

A human being whose spirit is full of faith and sincere intentions and who has established an unbreakable bond with God's infinite power is more powerful than any degenerate power in the whole world. Even if he should suffer a setback and defeat in his confrontation with the material power of evil, he will not consider himself insecure and abandoned; for with all his being he relies on the great power of God and is led by His guidance, which is true guidance.

Overcoming corruption and guiding the lost ones to the right path are fundamental elements deeply rooted in the Islamic faith, traits which become the part of the spiritual make up of the persons. By relying upon the everlasting power of God, they can subjugate to their will material powers, which are not the sole reality of the world.

In a letter that he wrote to the people of Egypt, Imam 'Ali, the Commander of Faithful, may Peace be upon hi, commends spiritual strength and courage of his newly appointed governor, who was a man of perfect faith, in these words:

O people of Egypt! I have appointed for you as governor a man from among the servants of God who allows himself no sleep in times of danger, nor has the smallest fear of the enemy in times of panic. He is severe against the wicked like a blazing fire. He is Malik ibn Harith, of the clan of Banu Mudhij ... He is a sword from among the swords of God: its edge never loses its sharpness, nor its blows ever go amiss.[9](#)

In the Battle of Siffin, the forces of Mu'awiyah took over the control of the river-bank and intercepted the supply of water to 'Ali's camp. The Commander of the Faithful tried to solve the problem through negotiations. Refraining from armed conflict so long as possible. But Muawiyah considered his possession of the river bank as a major military gain, and taking advantage of his position he refused to negotiate. 'Ali's companions had a hard time due to the lack of drinking water. Thereat 'Ali addressed his soldiers as follows

They are hungry of battle and are asking for it. Now you have no more than two alternatives before you:

either to submit to disgrace and indignity, or to drench your swords in blood and obtain water. To live in subjugation is death. Real life is to die while overpowering the enemy and without yielding to indignity. Mu'awiyah leads a party of deceived persons whom he has kept them in the dark about the truth, to the point that they have made their arrows a target of your throats. [10](#)

This fiery speech created a wonderful change in the morale of 'Ali's soldiers and filled them with the spirit of courage. With a lightning attack they threw back Mu'awiyah's forces from the liver bank and took control of it. But, then, with a manly spirit they allowed the enemies to have access to water for their needs.

Courage in its Wider Sense

Courage is not confined to the battlefield. Rather, it extends to all areas of life and is needed in all situations.

Dr. Marden discusses as follows the value of this outstanding moral virtue in various circumstances:

It requires courage to wear coarse cotton clothing when one's fellows put on garments made of broadcloth. Courage is needed to live a life of rectitude in the midst of poverty while others gather wealth through fraud and inequity. It requires courage to say 'No,' when everyone around you says 'Yes.' It requires courage to carry out one's duty in silence and anonymity when others hoard riches and acquire fame lay abandoning their sacred commitments. It requires courage to appear what you are and to disclose your shortcomings for critical eyes.

Ultimately, it requires courage to bear defeat and ridicule and not to be understood by the people. The young man who begins by being afraid to express what he thinks will end up being afraid of even thinking about what he cherishes in his heart.

How afraid are we of acting according to our wishes we want to live like others. Our clothes, lifestyle, means of transport everything, must conform to the day's fashion, or we would be social outcasts! It requires courage for a man of social standing not to bow to common prejudices and to refrain from complying with social customs injurious to morality and health. [11](#)

One of the salient qualities of those who had received an Islamic upbringing was their disregard for tyrannical rulers, despotic caliphs who had usurped power, so much so that they preserved their spiritual poise and intellectual strength under the most difficult of conditions.

Once Hisham ibn 'Abd al-Malik went to Makkah during the days of his rule to perform the pilgrimage of the House of God and the rites of hajj. He ordered that any person who had seen the Prophet of God, may Peace and God's benedictions be upon him and his Household, be brought into his presence so that he may discuss certain matters with him. He was told that no one from the Prophet's companions was alive. Hisham asked them to bring someone from among the Tabi'un (the people of the next

generation after the Companions) so that he may benefit from his discourse.

Tawus al-Yamani was invited to see the caliph. When Tawus came into Hisham's presence, he took off his shoes before the caliph and saluted him simply and unceremoniously: "Salamun 'alaykum." He did not salute the caliph with the usual title 'Amir al-Mu'minin' (commander of all the faithful) by which he was addressed by all classes of people. Then, without waiting for the caliph's leave, he sat down on the ground facing him. Then turning to Hisham he said: "O Hisham! How do you do?"

This informal conduct and speech of Tawus angered Hisham. Turning to Tawus he said: "What is this behaviour of yours in my presence?" Tawus asked him, "What did I do?" The caliph said, "Why did you take off your shoes in front of me? Why didn't you address me with my appellation Amir al-Mu'minin? Why did you sit down in my court without my permission? Why did you inquire about my welfare in an irreverent manner?"

Tawus replied: 'As to my taking off my shoes in your presence, I do it five times daily in the presence of God, and I am not considered worthy of divine wrath on that account. The reason that I did not salute you with the appellation 'Amir al-Mu'minin' is that you are not the commander of all the faithful, many of whom are unhappy with your caliphate and rule. As to my calling you by your name (and not by kunyah), God, in the Noble Qur'an, has called His apostles with their names, addressing them with such words as "O David," "O Jesus," "O John," and nobody considers that disparaging in respect of the sublime station of the prophets. On the contrary, the Qur'an mentions Abu Lahab with his kunyah. The reason as to why I sat down

without waiting for your permission in your presence is that I have heard 'Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, say: 'If you wish to see the inmates of hell, then look at him who sits while those around him are standing.'"

When Tawus had made these remarks, Hisham said to him, "O Tawus, exhort me! Tawus said, "I have heard 'Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, say, 'In hell are creatures with venomous stings which have been assigned to sting rulers who treat the people unjustly in the world.' " Having said this, he rose from the caliph's assembly and left. [12](#)

Hypocrisy, an Expression of Fear

Hypocrisy and ostentation reflect an inner fear. Courage rescues man from the clutches of hypocrisy and instills sincerity and authenticity into his soul. Ralph Waldo Emerson says:

If we cannot at once rise to the sanctities of obedience and faith, let us at least resist our temptations: let us enter into the state of war and wake Thor and Woden, courage and constancy, in our Saxon breasts. This is to be done in our smooth times by speaking the truth. Check this lying hospitality and lying affection. Live no longer to the expectation of these deceived and deceiving people with whom we converse.

Say to them, "O father, O mother, O wife, O brother, O friend, I have lived with you after appearances hitherto. Henceforward I am the truths. Be it known unto you that henceforward I obey no law less than the eternal law. I will have no covenants but proximities. I shall endeavour to nourish my parents, to support my family, to be the chaste husband of one wife—but these relations I must fill after a new and unprecedented way.

I appeal from your customs. I must be myself. I cannot break myself any longer for you, or you. If you can love me for what I am, we shall be happier. If you cannot, I will still seek to deserve that you should. I will not hide my tastes or aversions. I will so trust that what is deep is holy, that I will do strongly before the sun and moon whatever inly rejoices me and the heart appoints.

If you are noble, I will love you; if you are not, I will not hurt you and myself by hypocritical attentions. If you are true, but not in the same truth with me, cleave to your companions; I will seek my own. I do this not selfishly but humbly and truly. It is alike your interest, and mine, and all men's, however long we have dwelt in lies, to live in the truth. Does this sound harsh to-day? You will soon love what is dictated by your nature as well as mine, and if we follow the truth it will bring us our safe at last."

But so may you give these friends pain. Yes, but I cannot sell my liberty and my power, to save their sensibility. Besides, all persons have their moments of reason, when they took out into the region of absolute truth; then will they justify me and do the same thing. [13](#)

The relation of courage to personal capacity is like the relation of will power to ability. Until one does not utilize one's will power one will not succeed in accomplishing one's tasks regardless of the extent of one's ability to perform them. Similarly, as long as the talents and capacities of an intelligent and perspicacious person are not accompanied by courage and action he will not attain any noble and distinguished goal. A courageous person does not complain of being worn out in confronting difficulties and bears the unavoidable tragedies of life with a manly spirit.

It is an unfortunate man whose expectations are great but the amount of whose courage is paltry. Thoughtful people know well that one must go beyond one's expectations and wishes and resort to action; otherwise weakness and lethargy will make even feasible tasks appear impossible. It should however be opted that in the same way as at times in life one has to get ready and fight, so also at times it is wiser to withdraw. Those who never flag in asserting themselves and do not surrender in face of dangers may achieve their goal, but that may be at the cost of their own lives.

The most outstanding achievement of heroic persons is to conquer fear and remain steadfast with all their strength and power in the face of fear and without compromising the value of their own lives.

Of course, it is possible that one may achieve some success by appearing to be undaunted in one's efforts, but in these conditions it is possible that one may set out to do something which is impossible. When the goal is not achieved he may end up losing self-confidence and faith in his own capacities. Moreover, a great amount of his energy and power, which might have been employed fruitfully, will be

wasted.

The Eleventh Imam—may Peace be upon him—said:

There is a limit to prudence, beyond which it becomes cowardice. There is a limit to courage, beyond which it becomes rashness. [14](#)

On the whole there is a basic difference between fear and foresight. 'Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, may Peace be upon him, points this out in his sayings

When fate is inevitable, caution and wariness are pointless. [15](#) *When someone's resoluteness is accompanied will foresight that would lead him to consummate felicity.* [16](#)

Bertrand Russell writes:

Life is full of perils, but the wise man ignores those that are inevitable, and acts prudently but without emotions as regards those that can be avoided. You cannot avoid dying, but you can avoid dying intestate; therefore make your will, and forget that you are mortal. Rational provision against misfortune is a totally different thing from fear; it is a part of wisdom, whereas all fear is slavish. If you cannot avoid feeling fears, try to prevent your child from suspecting them. Above all, give him that wide outlook and that multiplicity of vivid interests that will prevent him, in later life, from brooding about possibilities of personal misfortune.

Only you can make him a free citizen of the universe. Fear, as an emotion, is disastrous in all cases where the right course can only be discovered by thinking; we want, therefore, to be able to foresee possibilities of evil without feeling fear, and to use our intelligence for the purpose of avoiding what is inevitable. Evils which are really inevitable have to be treated with sheer courage ... [17](#)

That which is certain is that one cannot succeed in overcoming life's hardships through fear and anxiety. A cool head and a strong and self-reliant spirit are needed to resolve knotty problems. One whose thoughts are constantly assailed by fear and panic will find the world grim and horrifying.

Those who lack courage do not find refuge from the awesome tempests of life. The danger exists that they may resort to suicide in order to escape the torment of fear and anxiety.

Imam 'Ali, may Peace be upon him, said:

Worthy men are reserved for times of adversity. [18](#)

[1.](#) Cowlest, Edward Spencer, Conquest of Fear and Fatigue, p. 510

[2.](#) Akfar e Schopenhaur, p. 97

[3.](#) Emerson, Ralph Waldo, "Compensation", in Man and Man: The Social Philosophers., pp. 447-8

[4.](#) al Fayd al Kashani, Muhajjat al bayda, vol. 7 p. 283

[5.](#) Nahj al Balaghah, Khutab 79

- [6.](#) al Amidi, Ghurar al Hikam, p. 319
- [7.](#) Marguerite Malm & Malm Herbet Sorenson, Psychology for Living, p. 299
- [8.](#) Nahj al fasaham. p. 382
- [9.](#) Nahj al Balaghaj, Khutab 38
- [10.](#) Ibid Khutab 51
- [11.](#) Marden, Orison Swett, Asrar e Kamiyabi, p. 14
- [12.](#) Safinat al Bihar, vol. 2 p . 95
- [13.](#) Emerson, Ralph Waldo, "Self Reliance" in Man and Man: The Social Philsophers, p. 407
- [14.](#) Bihar al anwar, vol. 17 p . 218
- [15.](#) al Amidi, Ghurar al Hikam, p. 315
- [16.](#) Ibid
- [17.](#) Russell, Bertrand, On Education, pp. 66-7, 154
- [18.](#) al Amidi, Ghurar al hikam, p. 581

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